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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7727  
INFO ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
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NSC WASHDC  
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SECDEF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000455

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: DELTA RELIEF: SMALL STEPS FORWARD, SOME BACK

Classified By: Poloff Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. On a June 2 to 4 trip to the Irrawaddy delta region, Poloff and LES observed a tight security situation, particularly in areas where significant aid is flowing. We also observed and compared government camps with an NGO-run camp, which according to the government should not exist. The GOB closed all of its camps in Myaung Mya, which had been a key gathering place for cyclone victims from the southern islands of the delta. No major outbreaks of diseases have been observed; instead they said depression, diarrhea, and infected wounds are the most common complaints among victims. Many victims have already begun to rebuild their homes, but desperately need more assistance to rebuild their livelihoods. Others who have fled their villages never want to return to the scene of their tragic losses. End Summary.

Security

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12. (SBU) On June 2 to 4 Poloff and LES traveled to the Irrawaddy delta region to assess damage and relief efforts in the area. We received travel permits to the area within two days of requesting them, which detailed all the towns we would visit as well as the order in which we would go. In Rangoon Division, riot police were stationed in small huts every few hundred feet along the road, presumably to prevent crowds from gathering and people from migrating into Rangoon City. Military checkpoints into Irrawaddy Division were strict along the road to Bogale where much aid passes from private donors and NGOs, and where relief efforts are less coordinated. In the northern and less hard-hit areas of the delta region, however, and as we went west to Labutta, we passed through security checkpoints without being stopped. We observed a military presence throughout the delta area, primarily guarding government-run camps and transporting supplies.

Forced Relocation, and What We Heard About It

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13. (SBU) On the road to Bogale, we found what had previously been a relief "camp" in Kyaik Latt in the hall of a monastery. A shop owner at the monastery told us that a week ago, nearly 900 refugees were living at the monastery, but local people asked them to leave because of deteriorating sanitary conditions. There were no latrines or cooking areas in the hall. Local monks had no information about the government forcing storm victims back to their homes. Dr. Khin Soe Swe of the International Organization for Migration

(IOM) in Bogale said that she had heard rumors about forced relocations, but had not been able to confirm any cases.

¶4. (C) The story in Labutta and its surrounding area, however, was much different. Myaung Mya, a three hour drive north of Labutta, housed 30,000 storm refugees ten days ago. The government closed down all of its camps there, scattering the people. The government told locals that because Myaung Mya had not been badly damaged in the storm, it was not a disaster area and did not need relief supplies. However, we observed fallen trees and collapsed homes as we drove through the area. Adventist Relief and Development Agency (ADRA) workers in Myaung Mya are currently trying to locate many of those refugees, who are hiding in churches, monasteries, and mosques throughout the area, in order to provide them relief.

#### Refugee Camps, Official and Unofficial

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¶5. (SBU) We visited two large camps a few miles outside of Labutta that the government created approximately two weeks ago. One camp housed approximately 1,500 people and another two miles away housed approximately 10,000. Most of the refugees we spoke with came from the southern islands of the delta region. Most of the tents in the camps were donated by ShelterBox, a Rotary Club International organization, or made of tarpaulins from Samaritan's Purse. Theoretically, each ShelterBox contains a tent, blankets, utensils, and food for ten people for one month. One woman staying in the camp told however, that when the victims arrived, they found only the tents. Other relief supplies had not been distributed.

¶6. (SBU) International NGOs such as Medicins Sans Frontiers (MSF), Merlin, UNICEF, and ADRA were all present at the camps. ADRA had provided makeshift latrines, MSF and Merlin treated medical complaints and provided clean drinking water, and UNICEF conducted programs to entertain and educate children in the camps.

¶7. (SBU) Donors provided rice, onions, and salt to the storm victims, as well as fresh drinking water. Several women told us, however, that they cannot live only on those commodities for weeks at a time and they have to buy other things such as vegetables, meat, and spices in Labutta. Everyone mentioned that prices are two to three times higher than normal for basic food items, a hefty sum for people who currently have no income.

¶8. (C) ADRA volunteers showed us one camp that they had created on June 3 for 141 people who had been forced out of government camps. It was well hidden, far from major villages and about a twenty minute walk from the nearest road. Many of these people lived for part of the year in the southern islands fishing and part of the year in the area surrounding the camp cultivating rice. We saw a large USAID tent, hygiene kits, rice, and little else. These were the first relief supplies that the victims in that area had received after their expulsion from government camps. The monk who organized the camp in conjunction with ADRA was not sure how he could continue to support the people. If more relief supplies come, they will be fine; many said they planned to move to relatives' homes in other areas. Otherwise, the monk said, people would have to stand on the roadside hoping donors would pass.

#### Health Concerns, But No Major Outbreaks

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¶9. (SBU) In temporary medical facilities throughout the delta region, doctors spoke of many of the same complaints among patients: depression, infected wounds, and diarrhea. At a temporary medical camp in Pyapon that the GOB and Government of India run jointly, a doctor told us that most of the 800 patients the facility treats every day have wounds and "general weakness," or depression. Workers from an MSF medical team at a refugee camp said that they treat for depression and some diarrhea caused by poor sanitation.

Depression was the biggest concern, she said, which they treated with multi-vitamin pills to help patients' immune systems.

#### Looking Toward the Future

¶10. (SBU) The list of things that people need to get back on their feet was long, but the theme was consistent: new homes, farm equipment, and jobs. Many people we spoke with never want to return to their home villages where they lost so many relatives. They plan to look for new homes and livelihoods elsewhere. But wherever they go, they still must obtain equipment for farming or find other jobs that allow them to feed themselves and their remaining families. Farmers who still live on their land need new equipment and seeds to begin planting the monsoon crops. Refugees in camps need everything, from clothes to cookware to jobs.

#### Comment

¶11. (C) The Burmese Government has provided some relief to cyclone victims. Its camps are clean and well-organized, and its medical units treat patients free-of-charge. The UN and NGOs also seem to be widely dispersed and providing much needed services. However, the relief falls far short of what people need before they will have any confidence that they can rebuild their lives. Most would like to return, but lack basic necessities to subsist until they can start generating an income. End Comment.

VILLAROSA